Triple Portrait as Proto-Capitalist Subject:

Camouflage, Extension, and the Circulation of the Object

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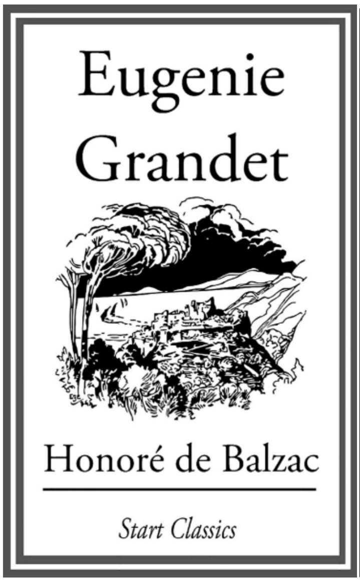
I say one must be a seer. The poet makes himself a seer through a long, prodigious disordering of all the senses—love, suffering, madness. He consumes all poisons and keeps only their quintessence… Through this unspeakable ordeal, he becomes the great patient, the great accursed—and arrives at the unknown. Even if he loses the meaning of his visions, at least he has seen.

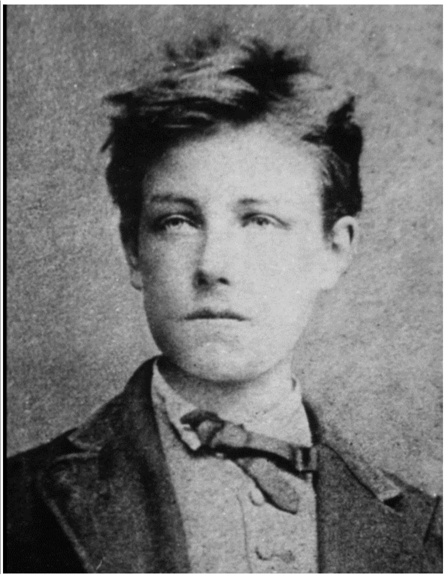
—Rimbaud

Hans Christian Andersen had already encountered a model for *The Shadow*, one he briefly alludes to within the tale itself: *Peter Schlemihl's Remarkable Story*, the story of "the man who sold his shadow" (illustrated above). In both cases, we witness the same decisive scene: man and shadow entering into exchange. In Schlemihl, the shadow is sold for gold, and with it disappears the subject's bond to the ground, the guarantee of belonging. In Andersen, the logic is pushed further: the shadow no longer needs to be sold: it emancipates itself, circulates, and returns as master. What passes from one story to the other is not a motif but a law. The shadow marks the point at which the subject detaches from itself and enters the world as movement. One narrative begins with a contract; the other culminates in a takeover. But both converge on the same irreversible consequence: once the shadow enters circulation, the hierarchy between man and projection cannot be restored.

There is a decisive moment in The Shadow that does not announce itself as such. A man, learned and composed, allows his shadow to detach and stretch itself across the street into a lit room. At first, nothing seems fundamentally altered. A shadow is, after all, already a projection. But what matters is not that it separates: it is that it returns.

It moves. And movement here works very transformative. The shadow does not merely travel; it learns how to inhabit spaces without resistance. It enters interiors, gathers knowledge, acquires wealth, and eventually returns: not as a reflection, but as an autonomous figure. It becomes, in Andersen's formulation, "*someone for himself*." The former master, bound to his study, his place, his coherence, becomes redundant. The shadow takes over. This is not an allegory of betrayal. It is the inscription of a structural mutation: the passage from a subject anchored in place to a subject that exists through projection and circulation.





Eugénie Grandet: a world where value does not circulate but settles thick, silent, and immobile. Here, gold anchors life to place, binding subject and house into a closed economy. Yet the cousin returns transformed: no longer the same man who once fell in love, but one who has passed through the East, converting everything, including spices, relations, even enslaved lives, etc. into gold. One—Eugénie—remains, deepening her roots in a romantic fidelity; the other moves rootless, and ruthless to love. And elsewhere, the fate of Arthur Rimbaud (right) repeats this fracture: the poet who sought the unknown through the disorder of the senses abandons poetry altogether, entering the circuits of trade—where vision gives way to value, and the seer becomes merchant.

A homologous tension unfolds in *Eugénie Grandet*. Eugénie inhabits a world where value is immobilized. Gold is locked, hoarded, thickened into walls and chests. It has weight but no trajectory. It remains. Her cousin, by contrast, belongs to another order. He does not guard wealth; he moves within it. He is not just defined by possession but by circulation. He travels, speculates, exchanges. His existence is not grounded but distributed. Between Eugénie and her cousin, between the scholar and his shadow, between Arthur Rimbaud and his blended fate as seer and weapons-dealer, the same division appears: one figure remains identical to itself, tied to place; the other becomes non-identical, extended across spaces. The question is not who possesses more, but who *passes*. To understand this *passage*, one must take seriously a formula that appears in Sigmund Freud:

> "Die Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiß nichts davon."
>
> The psyche is extended, knows nothing of it.

The psyche is not contained within the body. It is already outside: stretched, distributed, operative elsewhere. Yet the subject persists in imagining itself as localized, unified, present. This ignorance is not a defect. It is a condition. Why? Because it allows the subject to function (from) where it is not.

Is not the shadow in Andersen's tale precisely this extension of the psyche? It explores, adapts, circulates, while the subject remains fixed, unaware that its effective existence has already migrated. Unaware of whatever expereince that his shadows is doing elsewhere. The same holds for the merchant: he operates within networks that exceed any single location. His *presence* is a function of *movement*.

Maybe what Freud names as extension without knowledge becomes, in modernity, the very condition of power.

Camouflage as the bar

> The assimilation to space is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life. It should be noted in any case that in mimetic species the phenomenon is never carried out except in a single direction: the animal mimics the plant, leaf, flower, or thorn, and dissembles or ceases to perform its function in relation to others. Life takes a step backward.
>
> —Roger Caillois and John Shepley, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,"1

Roger Caillois provides the spatial logic of this extension through his theory of mimicry. Camouflage, for Caillois, is not imitation but a dangerous assimilation: the organism loses the distinction between itself and its surroundings

To camouflage oneself is not to hide, but to become compatible with space. The insect does not represent a leaf; it occupies the field of leaves. It survives by dissolving into the environment.

Phyllium: camouflage at its most radical—no longer imitation but assimilation. The body does not resemble the leaf; it enters the regime of the leaf, becoming indistinguishable from the space it inhabits. Here, form abandons identity in order to persist. What survives is not the organism as such, but its capacity to dissolve into its surroundings: an existence sustained by non-coincidence with itself.

[1] Roger Caillois and John Shepley, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October* 31 (1984): 16, https://doi.org/10.2307/778354.

This dissolution has an exact analogue in the transformations described above. The shadow survives because it becomes indistinguishable from the spaces it traverses. The merchant survives because he adapts to the flows of exchange. The subject survives because it enters representation not as a body, but as a surface among surfaces i.e. face among faces.

In this sense, the German expression „*jemand hat sein Gesicht verloren*" becomes precise: to "lose one's face" is to fall out of this field of surfaces, to become *auffällig*: distinguishable, exposed, no longer able to blend. What is lost is not honor alone, but the capacity for camouflage.

Jan Vinck, a merchant-diplomat, portrayed by Anthony van Dyck: not a nobleman by origin, but a figure who acquires the surface of nobility. The pose, the drapery, the column—everything speaks the language of inherited power. Yet the hands resist: functional, unornamental, they recall another economy. What appears here is a threshold subject—a bourgeois who has learned to enter representation as a "face among faces," a shadow that has become someone for himself by adapting to the space of power without fully belonging to it.

Camouflage, in this sense, is the spatial operation of what psychoanalysis calls the bar: the impossibility for the subject to coincide with itself.

This structure finds a striking visual articulation in the work of Anthony van Dyck. In the *Triple Portrait of Charles I,* the king appears from three angles simultaneously. Yet these views do not compose a unity. They fragment it. The king is not multiplied; he is split. Each face is complete, but none is sufficient. (chack also The Triple portrait of Cardinal de Richelieu)

Triple Portrait of Charles I: the king no longer appears as a single, unified presence but as a sequence of views—left, front, right—distributed across the surface. What begins as a practical study for sculpture already exceeds its function: the body is no longer the ground of identity, but its projection. Charles I is not multiplied; he is divided into perspectives, a sovereign whose presence operates through circulation—an early figure of a subject that can appear in several places at once, like a shadow learning to move beyond its source.

The threefold view of Charles I was likely produced to assist Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who had been commissioned to create a sculpted bust of the king. Since Bernini never traveled to London and never saw Charles in person, he relied on this specially prepared triple portrait by Anthony van Dyck, which presents the king from three angles. In this sense, the painting functions not only as a royal image but also as a working instrument—translating a living presence into a set of views that could be reassembled in sculpture. Despite the absence of any direct encounter, Bernini's bust was widely regarded as a success.The body no longer serves as a stable ground for identity. Instead, identity is distributed across perspectives. The subject is extended, but cannot gather this extension into a coherent self-relation.

Between these two moments—image and sculpture—something more specific than representation is at stake. It is not simply that the king is depicted and then translated into another medium; rather, his presence is pre-fractured into coordinated views, designed to function without the need for a unifying body. What travels is not the man, but a calibrated set of perspectives. The triple portrait does not just represent—it anticipates reconstruction at a distance, where identity is assembled from angles rather than grounded in presence.

This dispersion can be read as symptomatic of a broader transformation associated with the rise of bourgeois and mercantile culture. In this emerging order, presence is no longer guaranteed by lineage or place but must circulate, adapt, and appear in multiple registers. One could say that a certain unconscious Drang presses upon representation itself: the need to extend, to duplicate, to insert the subject into every available surface.

In this sense, the triple portrait does more than assist sculpture. It anticipates a world in which figures—once grounded—become increasingly "shadow-like": thin, mobile, and capable of entering diverse symbolic spaces. Just as merchants and patrons begin to inscribe themselves into religious and cultural images, the subject here is already learning to exist as a set of projections. The king's body becomes a site of transition, where unity yields to circulation, and identity begins to operate through its own multiplicity.

The painting thus gives form to Freud's formula: the psyche is extended—but the subject does not know it.

The king, like Andersen's scholar, remains bound to the illusion of unity, while his effective presence is already dispersed across projections.

Holy Face of Christ: one among many attempts in Christian iconography to secure unity against dispersion—the threefold (Trinitarian) difference gathered back into a single, frontal face. Multiplication here does not fracture identity but seeks to stabilize it: the same face repeated, as if to guarantee that goodness, power, and beauty remain inseparable. Yet this unity is fragile. As Friedrich Nietzsche later exposes, these qualities—traditionally aligned with Father (power), Son (beauty/incarnation), and Spirit (goodness)—do not necessarily coincide. They can separate: what is good may be weak, what is powerful may be ugly, what is beautiful may lack force. The icon thus stands at a threshold: an insistence that the face remains one, precisely where experience—and modern thought—begins to pull it apart.

Christ on the Cross with the donor Francesco Orero: now he is there. Francesco Orero kneels within the Crucifixion—an event he never lived—yet appears as witness, almost participant. This is not piety alone; it marks a new logic of presence. The image no longer guards its historical boundary; it admits insertion. The donor does not interrupt the sacred scene; he fits. He adopts its scale, its light, its gestures. This is camouflage in its cultural form: the bourgeois subject entering the highest symbolic capital by becoming indistinguishable from it: a face among faces, a shadow that remains visible precisely by concealing its whatness as shadow. Presence is no longer where one was, but where one can be placed. The sacred scene becomes permeable; and the subject, mobile enough to inhabit it.

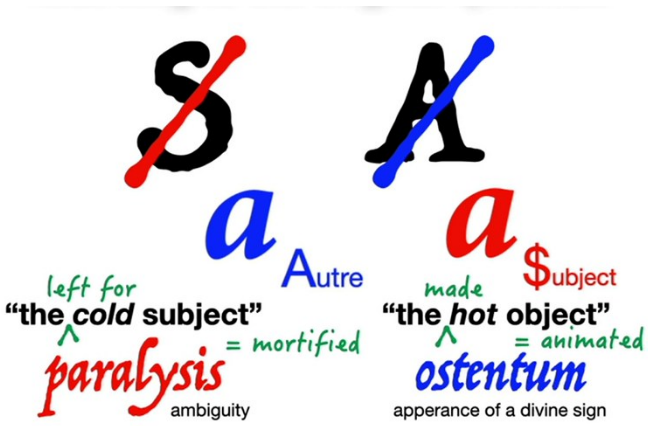
The painting enters the architecture as the donor enters the sacred image. Layer upon layer, the same logic unfolds: not belonging, but fitting. Palazzo Ducale, central chamber—exhibition space for Anthony van Dyck, himself also responsible for the pictorial program of the room: a space where painting, architecture, and illusion conspire to produce a field that does not fix the viewer, but absorbs him. The ceiling opens into an endless sky, the walls dissolve into distant horizons, and yet the room holds; coherently, almost indifferently, wherever one stands.

In the work of Philippe de Champaigne, particularly the *Triple Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu*, the same structure appears under a different aspect. Richelieu is presented in three views, but here the emphasis falls on consolidation. The painting prepares the transition to sculpture. The subject approaches the condition of an object.

Triple Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu: not a multiplication of identity, but its tiling across a surface. The three views do not converge; they repeat with slight variation, like a tessellation that could extend beyond the frame. The face becomes modular—capable of occupying adjacent positions without requiring a center. This repetition approaches a topological condition: not a sphere with a single privileged point, but something closer to a torus, where orientation shifts without rupture and continuity is preserved through circulation. Each profile folds into the next, as if identity were wrapped around itself. What emerges is not representation, but assimilation to space. The subject no longer stands against the background; it begins to function like a pattern within it—iterable, transferable, capable of extending. A face among faces, not unified, but continuous.

Triple Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu could be read through Don. Kunze's schema (below): the Cardinal's face appears as cold; not in an emotional sense, but in a thermodynamic one. The repetition of the face intensifies this effect. Rather than producing vitality, it drains it—each view slightly displacing the other, preventing any single, living center from emerging. This is precisely the regime of paralysis: The Cardinal becomes a surface of registration, a site where the bar operates visibly.

Against this, the "hot object" would not be the face itself, but what escapes it—the point of excess, of sign, of ostentum. The painting holds the subject's face at the level of controlled coldness (=icon), where identity persists only by remaining mobile within the grid of representation (=tesselation as torus).



Frame from Donald Kunze’s ongoing work on the barred subject ($) and the barred Other (A̸): a diagram of thermodynamic exchange where the *objet petit a* circulates as remainder. On the side of the subject, the bar produces paralysis—a cooling, a mortification, a loss of agency. On the side of the Other, the same operation yields ostentum—a heated, animated appearance, a sign that erupts within the field. What appears as two bars is in fact one operation, folded across a 2-dimensional double sphere (a topological space akin to the torus), where inside and outside are no longer separable. The subject’s loss becomes the object’s intensity; what cools on one side heats on the other. Paralysis and ostentum thus name not opposites, but two regimes of the same circulation—the cold assimilation of the subject and the hot emergence of the object.

This distribution of coldness is not merely a stylistic or pictorial effect; it obeys a law already formulated by Roger Caillois in his analysis of mimicry. What he calls assimilation to space entails a real diminution of life: a “step backward” in vitality, where the organism relinquishes its distinction in order to coincide with its surroundings. The mimetic animal does not represent the leaf; it becomes indistinguishable from it, and in doing so suspends its function as a separate, acting body.

Read through Kunze’s schema, this “step backward” is precisely what appears on the side of the barred subject as paralysis. The cooling of the Cardinal’s face—its reduction to a repeatable, tessellated surface—is not a loss without compensation. It is the price paid for entering the field of the Other (A̸), understood here as the space of circulation, visibility, and inscription.

One can now state the operation more rigorously:

> To assimilate to the space of the Other, the subject must surrender intensity; what it loses as life (coldness) reappears as sign (heat) on the side of the Other.

Hence we can appropriate Roger Caillois’ formulation appeared as the epigraph at the beginning of this part, for the painting of the Cardinal:

> The assimilation to space is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life… the animal mimics the plant, leaf, flower, or thorn, and dissembles or ceases to perform its function in relation to others. Life takes a step backward. (ibid.)

In Triple Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu, this “step backward” becomes visible as coldness. The face, repeated across three positions, no longer acts, confronts, or relates; it dissembles, ceasing to function as a singular presence among others. Instead, it assimilates to the pictorial field, becoming pattern, surface, tessellation. Personality recedes, life withdraws: what remains is an image that holds precisely because it has stepped back.

Conclusion

The barred subject ($) cools—dispersed, deprived of unity; the barred Other (Ⱥ) warms—condensed, objectified. Between them circulates the objet petit a as exchange: what the subject loses as consistency returns as intensity on the side of the object.

One sees this structure across domains. In Anthony van Dyck, the subject is stretched across perspectives, cooled into distributed views; in Philippe de Champaigne, the image condenses toward objecthood. In money, the same logic appears in the counterfeit: value does not reside in substance but in passage. It exists not here, but there; by circulating.

Dukatenscheißer**: a figure at the threshold of architecture, caught in the act of producing gold from the most abject remainder. Here, value no longer derives from substance, labor, or origin, but from transformation—an inversion that echoes what is argued in *The Inverse Alchemy of Deception: Camouflage, Currency, and the Teleportation of Value*. Gold appears not as ground, but as effect: detached, circulating, indifferent to its source. Like the counterfeit coin, like the shadow, value here is no longer anchored—it passes. What matters is not what it is, but that it functions. The body itself becomes a site of conversion, where waste is transmuted into currency, and where the distinction between inside and outside, origin and exchange, collapses into a single operation: the production of value through displacement.**[2]

Historically, this marks a shift. The feudal subject is grounded, identical to its place; the bourgeois subject survives by extension. It appears where it is not, inserts itself into scenes it did not live. The donor within the sacred image is its emblem: presence without origin, achieved through camouflage. This transformation culminates in this new read of the new condition of subjectivity:

> Die Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiß nichts davon. (The subject is extended without knowing it.)

It operates within a space it cannot totalize, surviving not by identity, but by circulation. The bar marks this condition: not simply division, but the possibility of movement.

The shadow triumphs because it accepts this extension. The subject fails (parralized) because it remains attached to itself.

[2] "The Inverse Alchemy of Deception: Camouflage, Currency, and the Teleportation of Value," accessed April 12, 2026, https://www.academia.edu/165632971/The_Inverse_Alchemy_of_Deception_Camouflage_Currency_and_the_Teleportation_of_Value.

What emerges is now a severe conclusion: To remain is to disappear.

The modern subject survives only by *passing*: by entering spaces it does not belong to, by appearing where it is not, by circulating what it cannot possess. What cools as subject returns as object; what withdraws as life reappears as (an iconographic) sign.

In this sense, the shadow does not simply detach. It teaches the law of survival: not to coincide, but to move. The subject dies because it remains attached to itself; the shadow survives because it lets go, entering the field of the Other where the object circulates. It does not possess the object: it becomes its trajectory.